



Northeastern
UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY PLANNING
AND RESEARCH



Co-op Finances Survey

During December and April of 2004-2005, the Co-op Finances Survey was posted on the myNEU portal and made available to all undergraduate students on co-op for each semester. The purpose of the study was to measure whether students' co-op earnings were sufficient to cover living expenses while on co-op. Students were also asked about their satisfaction with communications and activities while on co-op. Approximately 2,300 students had access to the survey in the fall, and 2,800 had access in the spring. A combined total of 386 students completed the survey.

Executive Summary

- ◆ With the exception of rent, most students do not spend more than \$250 on any particular living expense per month.
- ◆ Seventy-one percent (71%) of students stated that their earnings on co-op were enough to cover most expenses.
- ◆ Fifty-eight percent (58%) used their earnings to cover their expenses, although most students also used supplemental funding.
- ◆ The majority of students did not plan to use earnings toward a past or future tuition bill.
- ◆ Students noted dissatisfaction with University communications during co-op.

Respondent Characteristics

College	n	%	Class Year in Fall 2004	n	%	Residence	n	%
Arts & Sciences	120	31.1 %	Senior	22	5.7 %	U. Housing	166	43.0 %
Business	110	28.5	Junior	91	23.6	Close to U.	114	29.5
Engineering/Tech	64	16.5	Middler	181	46.9	Close to job	33	8.5
Health Sciences	45	11.7	Sophomore	92	23.8	Not close	40	10.4
Criminal Justice	28	7.3		386	100 %	Out state	31	8.0
Comp Science	19	4.9				Out country	2	.5
	386	100 %	Gender	n	%		386	100 %
			Female	215	55.7 %			
GPA	n	%	Male	171	44.3			
3.20	386	100 %		386	100 %			

I. Employment

Students were asked to indicate in what type of co-op assignment they were placed. Most students (83%) were in a faculty developed position and 13% were in a self developed position. The remaining 4% were either in an experiential, international, or combination assignment. The majority of students were employed in financial (17%), health (14%), and engineering (11%) fields. Ninety-four percent (94%) worked forty or more hours per week. Eighty-six percent (86%) were employed in Massachusetts and 60% in Boston. The mean salary was \$450 per week, with 50% earning between \$350 and \$560 per week.

Twenty-five percent (25%) held an additional job and, of these, 78% worked 20 or less additional hours per week. The mean salary was \$132 per week; the median was \$100.

Twenty-one percent (21%) of students claimed that they changed their prior living arrangement to go on co-op. The majority of those students were working out of state or country.

II. Expenses

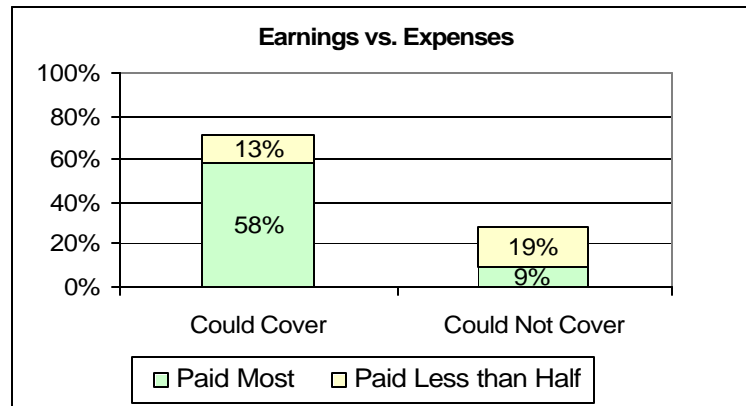
To determine what the monthly expenses were while on co-op, students were asked to indicate the ranges in which their expenses fell per month, excluding roommate portions, within the following categories. Most students did not spend more than \$250 on any particular category of expense. The most expensive categories were food and personal expenses. Students indicating \$0 on rent were at home or in University housing. Of the 43% of students who spent between \$501 and \$1000 per month on rent/room, most were not in University housing.

Figure 1.

Expense	\$0	\$1-100	\$101-250	\$251-500	\$501-750	\$751-1000	\$1001-1500	> \$1500
Rent/Room	36%	1%	2%	7%	23%	20%	9%	3%
Meals/Food	4%	20%	45%	24%	5%	2%	1%	0%
Utilities	65%	21%	12%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Vehicle	69%	8%	11%	8%	2%	1%	1%	0%
Commuting	10%	63%	19%	6%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Clothing	14%	50%	26%	8%	1%	1%	0%	0%
Technology	20%	59%	18%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Personal	1%	37%	41%	18%	1%	1%	1%	1%

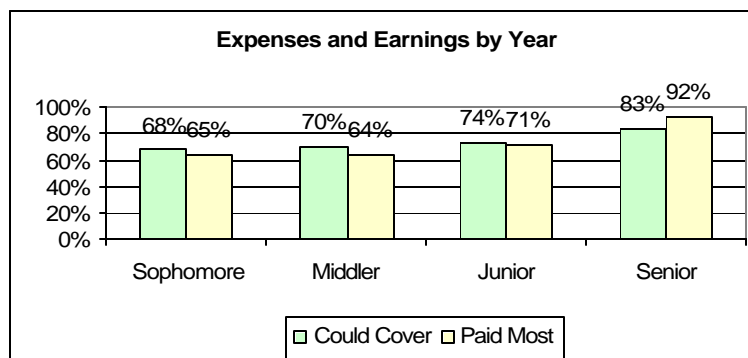
Students were asked whether their co-op earnings *could* cover their living expenses while on co-op and then whether they *used* their earnings to cover expenses. Seventy-one percent (71%) of students stated that their earnings could cover most or all of their expenses, and 58% used their earnings to pay for most or all of their living expenses. Thirteen percent (13%) could cover all expenses, but paid less than half. Nineteen percent (19%) could not cover, and paid less than half.

Figure 2.



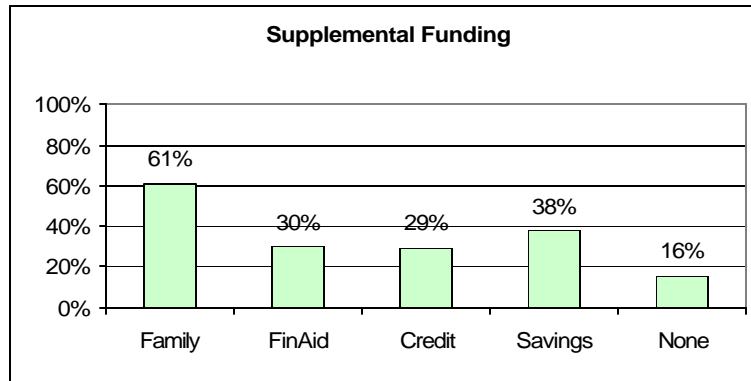
A higher percentage of juniors and seniors reported that their co-op earnings could cover most or all of their living expenses. A higher percentage also used their earnings.

Figure 3.



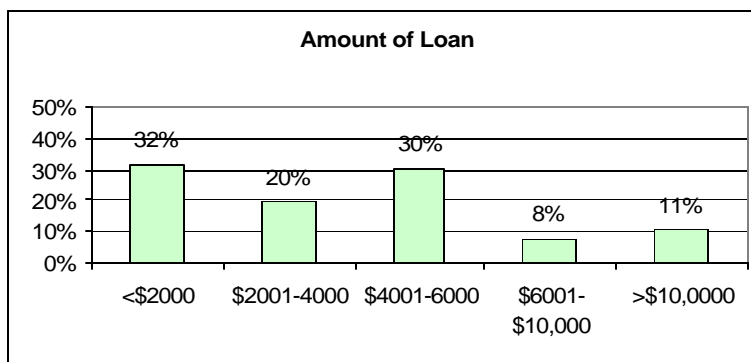
Many students used additional sources of income, such as family contributions, regardless of whether their earnings could or were used to cover their expenses. Respondents were asked to check all that apply, and the majority of these students used a combination of other sources. Sixteen percent (16%) indicated that they did not use any additional funds.

Figure 4.



Seventeen percent (17%) indicated that they either took out a loan or otherwise borrowed funds to help cover expenses, regardless of whether they claimed that they could or could not cover their living expenses. While the section instructed that the students answer based on the current semester, the variance of the responses suggests the possibility that students were either unable to break down annualized borrowings into monies used for one semester, or misinterpreted the intent of the question.

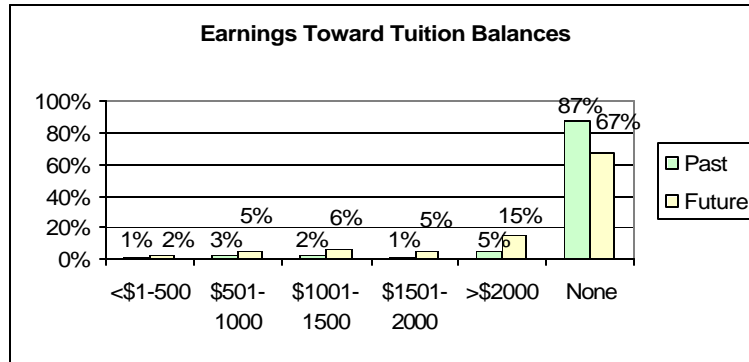
Figure 5.



min=\$260, max=\$38,000

Students were then asked whether they planned to contribute any of their recent earnings to an outstanding or upcoming tuition bill. The majority of students were not planning on using their co-op earnings for either.

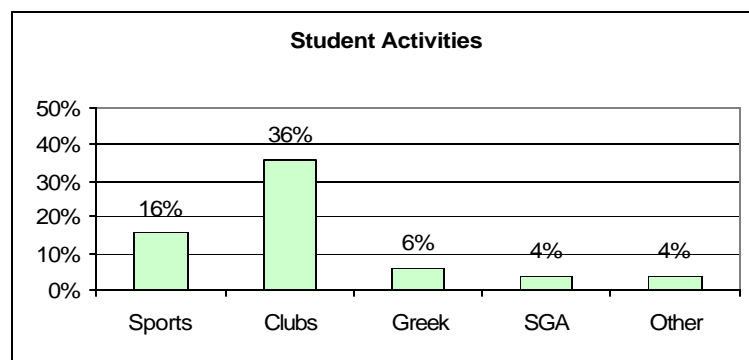
Figure 6.



III. Activities

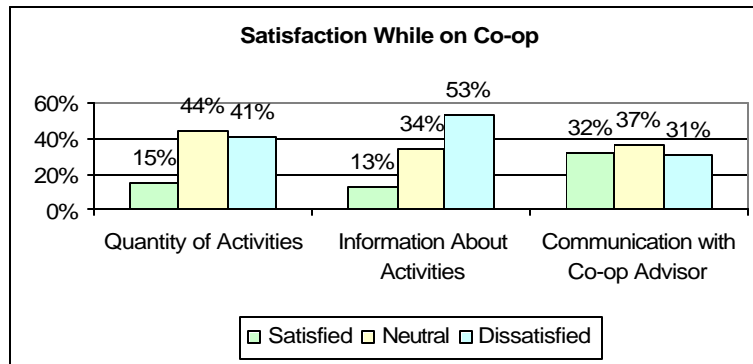
In the last section, students were asked about their social activities while on co-op and their satisfaction with the quantity of available information and activities. The most popular activity was involvement in clubs (36%). Examples of those indicating “Other” were community service, attending sporting events, and being a resident assistant.

Figure 7.



The majority of students responded neutrally when asked to rate their satisfaction with the quantity of student activities, information about campus activities, and communication with co-op advisor. Forty-one percent (41%) of students were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the quantity of activities available to them while on co-op, while 53% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with receiving information regarding activities. Levels of satisfaction with communications with the co-op advisor were more evenly distributed between satisfied, neutral, and dissatisfied.

Figure 8.



Students were invited to provide open comments at the end of the survey. The main themes in the content analysis of the comments were that students feel disassociated from the University while on co-op, that more communication is needed between the school and students on co-op, activities should be offered outside of business hours, and that the administration and faculty should offer extended hours, including academic advisors, co-op advisors, and business offices. The majority of students commenting on their co-op salaries also indicated prior in the survey that their earnings could cover all or most of their expenses while on co-op. A noted suggestion for further studies is to include questions on whether students plan to use co-op earnings to cover living expenses while in future classes, as opposed to covering tuition.